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## NATION

### Friendly fire suspected in death of Marine from Arlington

Posted Monday, Apr. 11, 2011 6 Comments

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BY CHRIS VAUGHN

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The U.S. military is investigating whether a Marine reservist from Arlington and a Navy corpsman from Michigan were killed last week by "friendly fire."

A military spokesman in Afghanistan confirmed that the death of Marine Staff Sgt. Jeremy D. Smith, 26, on Wednesday is "being looked at as possible fratricide." Seaman Benjamin D. Rast, 23, of Niles, Mich., a corpsman attached to Smith's unit, was killed in the same incident.

NBC News, citing military officials, reported Monday that the men were killed by a Hellfire missile fired by a U.S. Air Force Predator drone in what was apparently a case of mistaken identity.

Smith and Rast were part of an element of Marines reinforcing other Marines under fire outside Sangin in Helmand province in southern Afghanistan, according to NBC.

The Marines under fire were watching streaming video of the battlefield fed to them by the Predator, NBC News reported. When those Marines saw infrared images of armed men moving toward them, they called in the missile strike, believing that the men were the enemy, NBC reported.

The spokesman in Afghanistan said he could not confirm NBC's report.

#### A father's forgiveness

Smith's father, Jerry Smith, said Monday night that he was aware of the likely reason for his son's death but didn't know many details.

But he isn't interested in recriminations right now.

"Whoever that young man or woman was, they didn't send that drone over there to kill my son or Doc Rast," he said. "If it was a royal screwup, it was a royal screwup. Make corrections because I don't want another family to have to go through this. But trying to put a bigger burden on that person who fired the missile is not something I would do.

"I guarantee you if he was standing in front of me, he'd be asking for forgiveness, and I would give it to him."

Jeremy Smith, a 2003 graduate of Arlington Martin High School, served in Alpha Company, 1st Battalion, 23rd Marines, a reserve infantry unit out of Houston. That unit had just arrived in Afghanistan in March.

It was Smith's fourth combat tour since enlisting straight out of high school. He had served three tours in Iraq on active duty before returning to Texas and entering the reserves.



View photos

#### Services

##### Services

Funeral: 11 a.m. Friday, Grace Community Church, 801 W. Bardin Road, Arlington.

Burial: 3 p.m. Friday, Dallas-Fort Worth National Cemetery.

Visitation: 6 to 8 p.m. Thursday, Moore Funeral Home, 1219 N. Davis Drive, Arlington.

Memorial contributions: Instead of flowers, Jeremy Smith's family asks that donations be made in his name to the Wounded Warrior Project, a nonprofit that works with wounded servicemen and women. Information: [woundedwarrior.org](http://woundedwarrior.org).

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Jerry Smith said he would prefer that the focus on his son be about his service and commitment to the Marine Corps and the Marines he loved, rather than on "someone's mistake."

"He was in his element," he said. "I asked him about a civilian job, and he said: 'Dad, the problem I have with it is, it's just a job. What purpose does it serve except for paying your bills?'"

"He just needed to be doing something with more lasting value."

Smith said he has faithfully read about the casualties from Iraq and Afghanistan ever since his son enlisted in 2003, praying for and often crying for those parents whom he didn't know.

He could not comprehend how difficult that grief would be, as it turned out.

"It's hard," he said. "And I'm just one of thousands to have to go through this. A dad and son couldn't have been closer to each other than we were. I'm so grateful for that. And I'm so proud of him that I don't know how to express it."

Jeremy Smith's body is returning to Texas today, his family said.

Chris Vaughn, 817-390-7547

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